

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

LEO ROWEN

FEBRUARY 15, 2007

KENOSHA, WISCONSIN
Via Phone

INTERVIEWED BY MICHAEL HOSKING

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ABSTRACT

Leo Rowen was born March 25, 1958 and raised in Waukegan, Illinois. He joined the U. S. Air Force on April 17, 1977. Once in the Air Force, Rowen was trained in missile maintenance and then stationed at Ellsworth Air Force Base. Once there, Rowen worked replacing the guidance systems and war heads on the Minuteman Missiles in South Dakota. He was a member of the 4401 OMMS (Orginational Missile Maintenance Squadron) while stationed at Ellsworth AFB. His enlistment in the Air Force was up in April of 1981.

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INFORMANT: LEO ROWEN
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL HOSKING
DATE: FEBRUARY 15, 2007

MICHAEL HOSKING: This is Michael Hosking, historian at Minuteman Missile National Historic Site conducting a phone interview with Leo Rowen on February 15th, 2007. Leo, just a couple quick, easy questions at first. First, just spell your last name for us, for the transcription.

LEO ROWEN: Okay. It's R-o-w-e-n.

HOSKING: And when and where were you born?

ROWEN: I was born March 25th, 1958, at St. Therese Hospital in Waukegan, Illinois.

HOSKING: I sent you some preliminary questions, and I'll kind of ask those for the sake of getting them on the tape. When did you join the Air Force?

ROWEN: I joined April 17th, 1977.

HOSKING: And your basic training was where?

ROWEN: Basic training was six weeks down at Lackland Air Force Base outside of San Antonio. I think the squadron there was 3703 BMTS.

HOSKING: After your basic training, what unit did you end up in?

ROWEN: Well, I went through my basic training and I had like one day of casual status awaiting orders, and when I received my orders it was for . . . I think it was called Weapon System 130F, or something like that. Minuteman II, or Minuteman Missiles. And I was stationed for tech school at Chanute Air Force Base right outside of Rantoul, Illinois. That's about maybe twenty miles north of Champaign-Urbana in Illinois.

HOSKING: For the missiles, when did you first hear about the ICBM Program or the Minuteman Missiles?

ROWEN: Well, I didn't know for sure what I had until I received my orders. But when I was in basic training, I had to go through a special security briefing for some of the jobs. I guess there were certain fields at the time that they were considered critical. EOD was one of them, and there was a couple others in missile maintenance, what I did. That was another one of the critical career fields. That's when I first had an idea about the ICBMs.

HOSKING: Was this the only field you went into in the Air Force?

ROWEN: Yes.

HOSKING: Did you have a choice to go in the field, or was this one that you were kind of said this is what you're doing?

ROWEN: I initially was set up to join the Air Force sometime in March, but, unfortunately, I had slipped on some stairs and injured myself. I had a guarantee job as Aircrew Egress, but because I wasn't able to join at that time, I came back in, and then I was just tossed into the pool. It was like my name came up, and Minuteman Missiles was open, and that's pretty much how it happened.

HOSKING: So it's not something you strove to get into. It's something you kind of got pushed into at that time.

ROWEN: Yeah, the needs of the service comes first, they always told us.

HOSKING: Once you left your tech school, you were transferred to Ellsworth?

ROWEN: Yes.

HOSKING: Pretty much straight from there. Did you end up living on base?

ROWEN: At that time Ellsworth was kind of an older facility. The base housing was kind of short. It's kind of a funny story. I hooked into . . . I won't go into that. It was just kind of a funny story.

HOSKING: Go right ahead. You're welcome to.

ROWEN: I was supposed to be there on a Friday in November, something like mid-November, I think. So I flew from Chicago up to Minnesota, and I ended up hooking up with some other guy who was also stationed out there. We pretty much stayed friends the whole time I was out there. But when we were flying from Minnesota out to Ellsworth, we were on our way out there and they told us it was a fifty-fifty chance that we would make it into Rapid City Airport. We said, aw great, a nice way to come in.

So we got in there, and the base was pretty much . . . it wasn't shut down yet, but it was pretty close to it. We had a mild . . . at that time I think it was a mild twelve-inch snowfall. I stayed there at a base hotel for Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Made arrangements to get hooked into the first sergeant, and he took us to the barracks. We stayed there at the barracks for, I think, about four months, five months. Like I say, the housing on base for the enlisted were pretty short, short-handed on that. So we only stayed there for, like I say, four months, five months, and then, because of our career field, we weren't able to access the chow hall like everybody else. They put us on BAS, basic allowance for

subsistence. Then we also ended up getting BAQ, moving off base. I think it was early of 1978, maybe February of '78, I was moved off base.

HOSKING: Did you end up living in Box Elder or were you in Rapid?

ROWEN: I think initially . . . let me see if I can remember. I did live in Box Elder a little bit, a couple of times, but I think most of the time I lived in town itself.

HOSKING: The reason I ask is, we've heard off and on throughout the history of Ellsworth Air Force Base that there were periods that the local population didn't get along so well with the military personnel. Did you have any issues with that? Or were you just another resident with no issues at all?

ROWEN: I'll make this comment, and I don't mean to be discriminatory against the Indians, but we were called "flaps" and . . . I only had one person call me that one time, and that was an Indian in a liquor store. Other than that, I think the people in Rapid City was great. I can't complain about them. I thought they were excellent.

As an example of that, I lived in Waukegan near the Great Lakes Naval Training Station. I came home one time in my blues, because my family had never seen me in my blues, my Class A blues, and they look totally different from the navy uniform. Well, here I am driving a car after being picked up at the train station and somebody calls me a "squid." I just laughed at them and said, "It's blue, not black, dude." And the people used to give the sailors a hard time. They still do on occasion. But as far as Rapid was concerned, no, I never had no problem.

HOSKING: I've heard the term "flaps" one time, and I haven't ever gotten it on tape. I know partially what it means, so you can go into as much depth in the language as you want. Do you mind telling me what that stands for?

ROWEN: Well, from what we heard, when it came from certain individuals it was meant as a derogatory term. Like f^%&in' lazy-ass people. But we liked to twist it around as another acronym, because the military's big on acronyms. So we liked to just call it fun loving appealing people. (chuckles)

HOSKING: Okay. That works. Well, now that we've kind of established where you lived, that type of thing, let's get into some of the basic duties of your position. First of all, what was the unit that you were in while you were at Ellsworth?

ROWEN: I think I was assigned to the 44th Strategic Missile Wing, that was Strategic Air Command. The squadron was the 44th OMMS, that's Organizational Missile Maintenance Squadron, and the basic shop was Missile Maintenance Team, MMT.

HOSKING: I know you wrote me the job description, basically what they would tell everyone. Do you mind talking about that. Was that truly what you did, or did it really expand way above and beyond that job description?

ROWEN: I'll digress a little bit. My career's really AFSC, that's the Air Force Special Code, with a 44350 with a shred-out of G. I think the G stood for the Minuteman II missiles. I think the F was for Minuteman III or something like that. I can't really recall exactly, but I know it was a shred-out of the G, 44350G. In that career field, we were called upon to do quite a few different things. Some people worked in VECB, that's the Vehicle Equipment Control Branch. Some people worked in what was called the Field Maintenance Squadron. You have an interview from an individual from that, the electromechanical team or something like that. We went through tech school, and some of us worked . . . I shouldn't say that, but some of the jobs, they did periodic inspections of some of the equipment that we used, like the work cages, and whatnot. I'm trying to think. There was something else. So not everybody worked up into the missile maintenance. We were pretty much spread out. There was security systems, like the A-plug and a B-plug. People were assigned to work on that. The A circuit, the security guards, that's what they used to enter. I hope I didn't get drifted off here.

HOSKING: Some of this we can find out sometimes, but sometimes it's just better to hear it from the people who dealt with it all the time.

ROWEN: Like I said, the 44350 AFSC, the specialty code there, some of us worked with the missile maintenance with their hands on inside the tube on the site. Others, for whatever reason, maybe they didn't meet their security qualifications or maybe they just didn't have a slot available for them at that time. Some of the people even went into working on missile handling teams. That's the team that actually places the stages of the missile itself into the tube. That's the group that used something that's called a transporter erector. That's the one truck that they use for that. When the C-141s came in with the missiles from Hill Air Force Base, they're the ones who downloaded it off the aircraft and held onto it until it was ready to go into the tube.

My job title, I think the basic explanation they told us was remove and replace aerospace vehicle equipment. That's basically the guidance section, which we called the "can." There was a PE spacer. That was like a chaff dispensing unit that was used to hide the warhead so they could block the target in so the enemy wouldn't know what target that the warhead, meaning the nuke, was going to hit. But they quickly did away with that. At the time there were no ABMs, anti-ballistic missiles, so how are you going to stop it? And the we swapped out the RV on occasion. Sometimes we had to replace the missile itself, the stages.

Do you want to go through actual detail with what we called the can changes was supposed to be like?

HOSKING: Yeah, go ahead.

ROWEN: Well, when I first got there, I was still in OJT, that was on-the-job training. They didn't want anybody to actually have hands on the missile, a live system, until you had already completed some actual on-hand training and you were qualified through the QC. You'd be more familiar with the TOs, the tech orders, and whatnot, and they wanted you to become proficient at what we were doing before they turned us loose to build up that team attitude.

When we first got out there, you'd work one day and then you'd have the next day off. We even had dispatches on the weekends, but I guess because of the security involved with that, they stopped that shortly after I got there. Sometime in '78, I think, they stopped doing the dispatches on the weekends. So our work week was Monday, Wednesday, Friday one week, and then Tuesday, Thursday another week. It would rotate like that. But then one week a month we would be assigned in shop for recurring classes, or whatnot. Because we had to be codes qualified, safety, vehicle training, firearms training, whatever. So they left us one week free for that. But there was usually three—they called them work centers—a day, and they usually started at, like say, three, three-thirty, four a.m. in the morning. So if I use a morning I'm a dispatcher, say if I was the number one, that meant our team was probably going to get a can change or a bomb swap. Usually the high category, critical jobs. So that means you've got to get up at like one-thirty in the morning and get ready.

It's like the mailman—rain or shine, sleet, cold, it doesn't matter, you'd have to go in. So you'd have to go in, be there like two-thirty to come through the main gate. We'd usually have to stop off at the armory and pick up a firearm. We'd get in there by three o'clock, and then we'd have to start checking out our trucks. That's when we'd really find out what job we really had. Then we'd have to go check out our equipment. We were split up into teams. There was a team, but we were split up into a topside, and then the downstairs team. Two guys would work with everything that was upstairs and outside, and then two other people would be responsible for everything that went inside. And the team chief had the overall responsibility for all of it.

We would come in there, and we would check out our vehicles. I was usually downstairs all the time, so I have what they call a MET van, a maintenance equipment trailer, or something like that. It was usually a four-door pickup truck with like a fifth wheel attachment, a small trailer, like a two ton. I think it was a five-ton trailer. And it has all our equipment, all the cables for the electrical checks and all the test equipment. A lot of it was specialized. About the only thing that wasn't specialized was a volt-ohm meter. Everything else

was specialized, one use only. We'd have to check all that and make sure it was all working. The elevator work cage, which was really important because you had to make sure all the pieces were there.

Then we would sit around and wait until the code section had our guidance section ready. The codes came in there because every one of the missiles has to have a launch code in order to fire. We held the A section of the launch code. There's two part of it. You have the software portion of it, and then you have the hardware portion, which is the P-plug, and that's where our classification for codes came into. So we'd have to maintain control over this guidance section, and they didn't usually like to release that for us to load onto a truck for half an hour 'til we were ready to depart. Because once that thing was loaded, then we had to be responsible for it. That's why we had to be armed. I mean, it was kind of like a Barney Fife with a .38 caliber revolver with six shots. And that's all we had. If anybody ever really seriously wanted it, they could take it.

They didn't want us to leave the base until sunrise, so once we got ready to leave, we would go over to the security branch, site security, and we would pick up a security team, usually two guys. The majority of the time they were armed with M16s. They were a team. We picked them up. Because of the security involved with it, they wanted to have one team responsible for opening up the A circuit and then our team chief on the maintenance team, or any maintenance team, was able to get into the B circuit actually inside the site. It was all secure. Because they always needed at least two people to access one of these sites.

So we'd go and pick up our guards, and we'd have our location of where we had to go. We had the maps from VCB and we'd drive out to the site. At the time I think the speed limit was fifty mile an hour for us. We'd have to do radio checks every fifteen minutes and tell them where we were. This was back in the time when there was no GPS or anything else. You'd just have to give it your good guess of where you were. I don't remember exactly how we did it. If we were on the highway, we would say mile marker blah, blah, blah. But once you get out on the plains on these gravel roads, it's kind of hard to say where you were.

We would drive out there on these gravel roads. Sometimes if we were lucky they were close and it would take us maybe about an hour to get there. But sometimes, like the Julie sites were all the way out there by Faith, South Dakota, so it would take us like two hours, especially if the rally was in town in Sturgis because they didn't want us to go through Sturgis, naturally. So we'd have to take all the side roads.

We'd go out there. The team chief would call up the site, the flight security controller, tell him we were there. They would give us authorization to enter the site. We'd give them our trip number and the whole nine yards, and they would give us the authorization to enter the sites. We'd want to let them know

that we were breaking the outer zone security on their site so they didn't panic. We'd go in there, and the semi would have to back up over to the site. That's that one big white van on that picture.

HOSKING: Is that photo four?

ROWEN: One, two, three, four, right. With the still picture and the guy on the front?

HOSKING: Yeah.

ROWEN: And then the one right after it, five, that white piece that's sitting on the floor, that's the guidance section. The guy there, that's call the RV cradle, that's what we used to take the bomb off the missile. There is a bomb inside that right there.

But, yeah, we had to back the van over to the hole, and then the security team would go downstairs and authenticate their codes, just like a password type deal, to the security controller, downstairs to the combat crew. And they would get the combination for the A circuit. Then the team chief would go downstairs and talk to the combat crew, and he would get the password for the B circuit. The security team would unlock it. Then they'd have to back out the screw, then they'd flip a switch. The team chief, while he was downstairs, he would turn on the hydraulic pump for opening up the A plug, the door. I'm trying to see which one of these pictures has it.

HOSKING: I don't know if I have that.

ROWEN: Yeah, you have one picture . . . I think it's number six. The big launcher closure is open, and on the left hand side there you have that A-plug there. We'd have to sit there, and sometimes when you flip the switch, once you did that you would break the inner zone security. Then that thing would just open up, then the team chief would go down there and he would dial his combination in there and he would flip the switch to turn that thing on. As a security precaution, in case somebody was there and ever made it that far and they weren't supposed to be there, depending on how far that site was from the launch facility, that could be anywhere from a five minute all the way up to a half an hour or forty-five minute delay to start that plug. But that was okay because it gave us plenty of time to unload the trucks and get everything ready for our job. Then we would take the downstairs equipment and we would send down the work cage with the hoist, and whatnot, and the nitrogen bottles and all the equipment downstairs. Then the two guys downstairs would set all the equipment up in the proper spots.

We really couldn't do anything until Combat Targeting come out there. Combat Targeting were basically the people that handled the software system for the missile. They were the ones who actually were responsible for shutting down

the missile itself. We couldn't really do anything other than put in a site command system key to actually lock out the missile to keep it from ever being fired. But that was all we could do. We couldn't do nothing else. We'd have to wait for the Combat Targeting, and then we usually helped them guys lower their equipment down there. They had the tapes and whatnot. They would have to shut down the computer system inside the guidance section already on there. Sometimes we'd have to wait for them guys because they always had the other half of the launch codes for the missile. See, because of the security involved, they never wanted to have the whole launch code in one place, unless it was at the missile site. Them guys always had two security guards also, so we always had four security guards on site as a minimum. Later on, we always had . . . they called it a Security Alert Team, a SAT team. They were driving around in those armored cars that you have at Ellsworth and, I think, at Delta 1 also.

HOSKING: The Peacekeeper?

ROWEN: Yeah. We just called them armored cars or whatever. Every time the door was going to be open, they had one of them guys rolling around because of the security involved.

The Combat Targeting Team would have to shut the missile down, and then once they did that they downloaded all the programs and all the software codes out of the guidance section computer, and they would go back up and they would sit around and do nothing. I mean, they couldn't do anything until we were done. But then we would start. That launcher closure door being rolled open . . . that's back to that one picture, I think number four there, the snow picture?

HOSKING: Yeah, with the truck over top?

ROWEN: Right. They'd have to open that door, put those side panels down for environmental systems, and then they would use the one handling equipment, like the one picture sandwiched in there. I think it was number five. They would use some of that lifting equipment. That one thing there is called the RV cradle, and we would drop that down. The topside team would run that down until it was past the door. There would be another pendant that the team chief would handle, and he would bring the cradle all the way down. Picture number three is a good one.

But I got ahead of myself. Before we could even do anything like that, the cage operator would have to jump inside the cage, and then he would have to be responsible for putting the safety pins in the missile. I can't remember how many there were, but there were like seven or eight. There was a thruster _____, an igniter, on each one of the stages, so there were like six pins. That took about may a half an hour, forty-five minutes to do it. Then they would come back up. They would have everything shut down. The board man would

have that umbilical . . . picture number three. They would start doing that. The coolant system would be shut down. We would get the bomb ready.

Then I would come around, and there was a little access panel. You can see a little round red marker on there. Just to the left of that is the RV access door. The cage man would take that off, and that's where you actually made the electrical disconnect to the bomb itself. Then that cradle that we have here on number five, then they would lower that RV cradle, like I said, down through the door. Then the team chief would take it and we would run it all the way down. There were little arms, and we'd have to screw it into that, and we'd have to take all those bolts out. Then we'd just take all those pieces off. Then we'd have to turn around and replace them with the new ones.

Sometimes when you first started out it took you a while because you're not familiar, plus you're not working with people that you're used to. When we first started it would take us ten, eleven hours to do a can change. But by the time we were done, we were very proficient in it. Heck, it would take us six hours gate to gate. So we got pretty good at it.

Sometimes, if you're lucky, you got home at night if everything went okay. Other times, if you had a bad piece of equipment, sometimes they'd have to drive one out there to you. Or if it was really urgent, they would chopper it out. Then that left you with the dreaded RON, rest overnight on an LCF. Ee-hah.

HOSKING: You didn't care for that, then?

ROWEN: No. That wasn't home. That was not home. When you're up there working on these things, you took breaks for the washroom, but because you're usually . . . well, at least sixty miles, at a minimum sixty miles away from the base, you wanted to be back home. So you didn't usually stop for lunch or anything else like that. You didn't take breaks. You would get out there, all the teams, you did the job, and you finished as soon as you could, and you made it home as soon as you could. Because nobody wanted to stay out overnight.

Our usual workday started . . . for example, work started at three o'clock, and you're allowed a sixteen hour timeline, which meant you had to be back on base within about fourteen hours of your three o'clock start time in order for you to make it home. If you weren't able to make it in that time range, you had to RON, because they were concerned about people falling asleep and hurting themselves leaving the base after working all them hours.

Am I missing anything? Any questions?

HOSKING: Well, the thing that came up as you were talking, with the equipment that you were sending down into the silo when you first started getting set up, was all that equipment sent down to the B plug, the access area? Or did you roll the

blast door back and go ahead and send down the work cage through the larger opening?

ROWEN: No. We sent it off through the B-plug there, through the outside access there. I mean, it was kind of a tight fit, but it would make it. Everything fit down in that hole. The only thing that went down through the missile hole, silo itself, or the tube itself, was basically parts of the missile, the handling equipment for the missile. Like the GNC sling that they called it and the RV cradle. That was it. And the pendants, of course, but other than that, no.

Here's something kind of interesting about this picture here. I don't know if the door is open or not, but I just noticed it. Every time you're working around this hole, they expect you to be wearing a harness and lanyards. If there's any time of a possibility of a fall of six feet or more, they expect you to be wearing a harness and lanyard. You look at that very last picture with the one guy standing on the diving board on the left, and you see the two guys in the cage, they're doing it the right way, the harness and lanyards and all that good jazz. But that one picture with this guy inside the van, he's moving everything around. I'm assuming that the door is open. He's supposed to have a harness and lanyard on.

HOSKING: Okay. You have photo five there.

ROWEN: Yeah. And a helmet. That's a bozo no-no there. I just realized that.

HOSKING: One thing I'm thinking about, when you wrote me some responses to some of the questions I e-mailed you, you talked about some of the different positions that you had when you were in the silo. Photo seven shows most of what you talked about. Do you mind going through that again for me?

ROWEN: Okay. Now, when I was doing the job . . . maybe they changed it. The guy on the left with the one hand on the thing, the single guy on that platform—that's called the diving board—that's what I started out doing. That's the guy who would assist the team chief for a while, the electrical checks, and whatnot, when you reconnect the upper umbilical, and whatnot. The guy in the cage, that was the cage man. It was called elevator work cage operator. But there was always just one person in there. I don't remember . . . the one time there was ever another person in the cage with me was when it was a QC or a 3901 security or a site Maintenance Evaluation Squadron, called _____. They were basically stationed out at Vandenberg Air Base. Most of the time when you were in a work cage, you were by yourself, because it was a tight fit. You can look, you can see it's a tight fit. So that's pretty honest about what it was.

But all that equipment there, that work cage and that motor assembly right there, that was packed in like a big giant _____ blue box in the van, but when you got to the site, you pulled those pieces out. You can kind of like see it.

There's a clip on there that you attached a hoist to it and you lowered it down with the hoist. Then you had like a little hoist assembly with a chain hoist that you actually used to pick it up and sit it inside that rail.

HOSKING: Okay. To bring it back out of the silo?

ROWEN: Right.

HOSKING: Now, you mentioned that there's only one person in the cage. Because we were always told about a two-man concept.

ROWEN: Right.

HOSKING: Was it just the fact that there were other people close enough to you that you fulfilled that, or what?

ROWEN: Right. Anytime you were in a critical area, you have a thing called the SAC two-man policy. That had to do with what I'm saying about the codes, like the P-plug, and whatnot. That was part of the SAC two-man policy also. They always wanted to have at least two people who were acquainted with what was going on to have actual control over that piece of coded equipment. Now, we were okay to handle security for the guidance section, but we could not go and take control of, say, the Combat Targeting tapes, because that was a big time . . . no, they couldn't do that because you'd have the whole launch code in one spot.

That's something else that I want to tell you about. Like the sites, when we were doing a can change, we always had a Combat Targeting Team that was also assigned to work with us, or a maintenance team, and you couldn't ever leave at the same time. There always had to be at least a half hour separation between the two teams, a Combat Targeting Team and a Missile Maintenance Team, because of the security involving the hardware codes and the software codes. So whenever we were done, we would finish up closing off the site, and Combat Targeting would leave, and then we would leave a half hour later. I hope that answers your question.

HOSKING: Yes. I'm looking at the next question I have. After talking about what you did, and you mentioned the on-the-job training and the tech school. The question we always have, when you first started, did you feel like you were well-prepared for the position that you were in?

ROWEN: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. We spent . . . I think it was like maybe three months or four months on-the-job training. I mean, we would read and reread and read and reread. I can't say that enough. We would go over the TOs again and again and again. And then we would go over to the training site on the base there, you know, the one that they take the tours to? That was a training site. We would have to go through that . . . we were trained and taught basically

through repetition. We would have to pass a QC check before we were even allowed to go up to Delta 9. Then when we did go up to Delta 9, we would go out there and basically swap out the cans and that was about it. There was never an RV on Delta 9, so we'd just go up there in a truck and do the basic job. But we had to be qualified for everything, every little step of it.

To go back a little bit, all the changes. When I first started, all the positions were pretty much separate. There was no specialized job until eventually they decided that maybe all the hands on the work cage would be a little bit more specialized. So then they had someone actually dedicated to do the work cage job. I didn't start out doing the work cage, but the guy who was doing it, he got tired of it. I guess he didn't like the heights or something like that, so then we just swapped out. I said, "Okay, I'll give it a shot." I wasn't afraid of the heights, and actually I did pretty good in it. Shortly afterwards is when they made it like a specialized job. They tried to have everybody set up and trained on all the positions. In case somebody was sick or you had to bring somebody else in, you could fill in. With the exception of the work cage. If you did the work cage you couldn't swap anybody else out for that.

HOSKING: You mentioned that D9 never had the RV or reentry vehicle. Do you recall if other missile silos were set up that way?

ROWEN: No, Just Delta 9. There was a couple of times when we had alerts. I think maybe one of the times was when the Iranian hostage crisis occurred. We were called in and placed on alert then. Well, they didn't have a P-plug out there, either, so part of my job at one time was to hook up with a lieutenant, some guy with the combat crew, who was still A codes authorized. Me and him we had to go pick up a P-plug and run it out there to Delta 9 so they could tip the can and put the P-plug into it, and then they'd have a bomb out there also. There were a couple of times when Delta 9 was brought up to alert also. If it was a matter of national security, they did bring Delta 9 up on alert, too. They wanted everything hot.

HOSKING: Were you ever told why Delta 9 didn't have . . .

ROWEN: Because it was basically set up as a training site. It was as live as you could get without a bomb.

HOSKING: Yeah, because we'd always been told that, but it's kind of nice to hear that yeah, that's truly the truth, that that's why Delta 9 was the way it was. You were talking to me about training, safety features and that that you had when you were in the silo. We just kind of wonder, what kind of safety training did you receive? And what kind of safety training concerning the dangers of handling the warhead did you receive also?

ROWEN: I don't mean to sound like I'm minimizing everything, but really, as far as . . . how can I say it? The Minuteman II system was obsolete when I got out there. I made the comment to you about the Minuteman III. As an example, the Minuteman III was called like a modified or an upgrade, or something like that. But in the case of a near-miss hit from a Russian or . . . well, at that time there was only Russian, but of a Russian near-miss, except for the tube, the missile would always stand up perpendicular, stand up straight up and down, where the tube could be cockeyed, and there was a possibility that the missile would hit the side of the tube and the tube would be out of action. That's why they went to the cage system. The missile would be placed inside a cage inside the tube. Now, there were these things called articulating arms that, in case of a near-miss, the seismic activator or detectors would go off, and they had these arms that would shoot out with supreme full-out force against the wall, and that would hold the missile perpendicular to the tube. Now, that's strictly Minuteman III. And somebody died one time because they got between the pad and the wall, and they touched the explosive bolt without having a pin in there. So that's a safety thing.

The coolant that was used for the guidance section was called sodium chromate. It reminded me . . . it didn't smell like Mountain Dew, but it had the same color as Mountain Dew. Now, that was pretty bad stuff. They never did tell us why, but they told us don't ever handle this unless you have gloves on, and whenever you disconnect it, you wanted to connect the two ends together, because it had to be kept cool. I think you can see that in picture number four. It shows the umbilical attached to the missile?

HOSKING: Three you mean?

ROWEN: Yeah, I'm sorry, number three. Yeah, that's the umbilical, the GNC umbilical, and you can see the two lines hanging down there. You can see the one with an arrow going in. Those were the coolant lines. We had a recovery system for that. You had to disconnect it and hook it up to this little recovery can, because it collected whatever was left over, or whatever leaked out.

On that umbilical there also, you can see there's a red cap on it and like a hand screw right there that looks like nylon tape across it. That was where an electrical squib went to it. It shot off a bolt, or shot off something that busted the bolt that kept the thing attached to the missile.

HOSKING: You're talking about just a little circular thing that's kind of on the far left of the umbilical, correct?

ROWEN: Right. There's an electrical squid that attached to that. There was a little electrical charge. They'd tell us whenever you touch anything like that, you had to sit there and ground yourself off. Well, the board man usually handled that. He'd have to ground himself off. There were plenty of grounds everywhere.

You had to ground yourself, and you had to take the squib off, and you had a shorting spring. You had to put the shorting spring in it. Then you had a special ammo can. It was foam mounted. You'd put the squib in there and close it off, and you'd put that off to the side because you had to put it back on there. But they wanted you to take the squib off that thing right off the bat, as soon as you could. It was part of the procedure, because you didn't leave it on there. Another thing was, when I told you about disconnecting the RV, that same picture. That's what's called an RV shorting plug. The cage man had to put that on there.

But as far as the warhead's concerned, that was about the only safety feature the majority of the time that we had to deal with. Because there was so many safeguards built into that thing that the possibility of that RV having a nuclear yield, or like . . . I don't know, one in billions. There's so many layers of safety built into that thing. I mean, you could drop it and it isn't going to go off. Everything had to be virtually perfect in order for you to get a yield, the bomb, actual nuclear bomb. Now, you might get a conventional explosion because that's what they use in those warheads to get that implosion. We didn't have to worry about . . . there was no dosimeters or film badges or anything else like. When I checked out, my final physical for discharge, there was no concern about radiation or anything else like that.

HOSKING: Okay. Well, I guess while we're looking at this photo . . . we get a little confused where things start and stop on the missile between the reentry vehicle versus the guidance system versus the actual stages with the fuel in them. Could you just run through that real quick on that photo three, the close-up? I know we don't see all the stages, but we see the main top portion.

ROWEN: Oh yeah, you see enough of it. The number one thing on the top there, you see a seafoam. That's like an outer cover for the RV. There's only one bomb on there. That green spacer there, that's made out of beryllium. Then you have like a little foam . . . actually that's cork, with those bolts on there. From there on up, from that cork on up, that's the RV.

HOSKING: Okay, and that's kind of a light brown cork ring you're talking about.

ROWEN: Right, right. Now, the white thing there with the black access panel, there used to be a window there. They used to have to sight that thing using . . . whatever, T-lights and theodolites, and what not. But from there all the way down to . . . I guess you can go by those arrows there. See the two arrows on the RV, then the guidance section there, that little piece right there? That differentiates the difference, the break between the sections. The same thing on the bottom one there.

And where the screws are, from there on up through that other piece, that's all the guidance section. Then that piece there, that's the third stage. That one

cork piece right there that you see over to the left under that GNC umbilical, that's called the raceway cover. Whenever you disconnected the guidance section from the missile, you have sixty-four bolts or something like that. You take all those out, and then you have to raise it up about four inches. You had these four-by-four blocks. They're four-by-four in diameter by four feet long. You'd have to slide them in there carefully on top of the third stage, and then you would let the guidance section touch back down to rest on these boards, these four-by-four posts. And then you'd disconnect the umbilical, the third stage raceway, from the guidance section itself. Then once that was clear then they would raise the guidance section all the way up.

HOSKING: And when you're putting the guidance section on, did you usually put the guidance section on and then you dropped down the reentry vehicle?

ROWEN: Yeah.

HOSKING: As a separate piece, never together?

ROWEN: Yeah, right. You bring the guidance section back down, and it would be just the exact opposite, reverse. You set it down there, and you'd have the blocks in there, those posts, and you'd lift it on there. There was like a steel . . . it was all shielded for EMPs and whatnot. So it wasn't just a cable that was hanging up there in nowhere, it was like a steel bellows type deal for EMP and whatnot. We would connect that up first, and then we'd have the volt-ohm meter, and we'd check it between the two to make sure of continuity for the shielding of it. And you had a specialized wrench, a torque wrench, that you would have inserted in a raceway, and you'd hook it all up and then you'd crank the thing down, and then once it broke free . . . it was like a breakaway torque wrench, that's basically how these things worked. It was like a T-handle type deal, and you'd just crank it down until it broke loose, and then you know you had the right torque set. Then you would pull the blocks back out and drop the thing back down and start to put the screws in. Then they would drop down the RV, and when you brought it down there, the cage man would have to be around there to grab that cable from the top of the can and make sure it was able to feed through that access panel. Otherwise, it was a pain in the butt trying to get to it.

HOSKING: Some of these jobs sound a little more intricate than just screwing a bunch of screws on. One thing we get asked a lot, especially with the weather we've been having recently, is how did the weather impact your job down in here?

ROWEN: Look at picture number four. It shows a good example of what's going on. Now, before they could do that, sometimes you'd have to shovel out to the top of the door so you can get the truck there. Sometimes you could see where the snow's drifted in. There were times when you'd have to go out there and you'd have to shovel all that snow out. All five of us, the five man team, and maybe

even Combat Targeting if they felt like it, if they were in a hurry to get out of the tube. You'd have to get up there and you'd have to shovel all that area out to get the door open, before you could even do anything.

HOSKING: So it definitely had the potential of slowing you down.

ROWEN: Oh yes, oh yes. There were plenty of times . . . the wintertime definitely caused a lot of problems. Because think of all those sites, they faced to the north, so if you had the snow drifting in, it was bad.

HOSKING: What I was told is . . . the side doors on that trailer you mentioned, we were always told they were called the guillotine doors. Did that help a lot, or not, keeping the heat and temperature controlled that was in the silo to help you guys out down there?

ROWEN: That helped out pretty good. But, I mean, once that door was open, it got cold. (chuckles) There were times in the wintertime I kept my field jacket on. I was wearing long johns underwear, my field jacket, which had quilted inserts, and I couldn't wear a hat because I had to wear the hard hat. But still, anything on your head kept you warm. It still got cold. But you had to have those doors down, because it kept it a lot cleaner also. It kept a lot of stuff from blowing in on you. That was part of the policy. You had to have those doors down for environmental control.

HOSKING: I guess in the same measure, in the summertime, it helped with the heat?

ROWEN: Oh yeah, it was nice. I mean, just being inside the tube anyway, you're underground in the dark like that, it was automatically cooler. And those vans are set up to where they had their own little power unit—I mean, they didn't really work that well all the time—an auxiliary power unit that would supply like a five-kilowatt heater, and it also would keep it chilled, it also cooled. Those didn't work that well, but whenever you got out to a site, they had a separate cable that you would plug in, and you would have to use the site electricity for the hoist on that van. And also for the heating and the cooling also. I think the hoist was the only thing that was used for electricity. Everything else was by hand.

And the van had to be positioned within a half of an inch of those pylons, and it had to be leveled. They had to go in there with a tape measure, and they'd have to raise the . . . you can see in that one picture still, there's a jack on the back corner of it. We'd have to install those, the topside team, and they would have to crank that thing down, and they would have to raise that thing up, the whole van up to a certain height. I don't remember exactly what it was, but you'd have to be within a quarter of an inch of like nine inches, or something like that, as an example.

HOSKING: I wish we had a better picture of that. It's hard to see the jacks in there.

ROWEN: It looks pretty good. It's white. It's right behind that rear tire there.

HOSKING: Yeah, I can see it.

ROWEN: It shows you a lot. It's a pretty good picture.

HOSKING: You've gone through a lot of your procedures, a lot of your day and said how long it took. I guess just looking back at it, what was the one task that took the longest during one of these switch-outs?

ROWEN: It's hard to say. Probably safeing and unsafeing the missile were probably the one thing that took the longest. That's inserting the pins.

HOSKING: And you usually took about thirty minutes each time?

ROWEN: Right, yeah, thirty to forty-five minutes, something like that. Because when you removed them, the cage man would have to go all the way down to the bottom of the tube, down below the ring, to make sure that there was nothing down there on the bottom, like bolts or stuff like that that fell, in case of a launch. They didn't want nothing hitting the sides of the missile.

I guess there really wasn't too much concern about the . . . I mean, there was a concern about the SAC two-man policy, but as long as you were able to have visual contact with somebody, everything was cool. As long as you were in the tube like that . . . maybe I just told a cheat there. You were supposed to have two men when you went below the ring, because you're out of sight of the people up topside. But not too many people did it. I mean, my God, we were already okayed to carry firearms and work on nukes, so I can't recall too many people that followed that part of the deal. It just took too much time. That's one thing we probably cheated on a lot.

HOSKING: Do you recall any accidents while you were out there, or hearing about any accidents working around the missiles, working around the silos, that type of thing?

ROWEN: I told you about the one accident with the Minuteman III. I don't remember what base that was. I think this is what happened to us one time is whenever you assembled that work cage, you have it sitting outside the door, you have it sitting on the diving board, and before anybody ever jumped into it . . . see, the work cage, there was two ways of operating it. You had the controls inside the cage itself for a cage operator, and then there was another control, a pendant, on the outside for somebody else. Now, when you put the whole thing together, you were supposed to check to make sure that that top yolk was firmly connected. See on that last picture.

HOSKING: Yeah, photo seven?

ROWEN: Yeah. You were supposed to check to make sure that thing was connected by using your hand, not excessive force, of course, but you would bang on it and make sure the thing was firmly locked in, and you would look at it. Well, we did that one time and we thought it was all okay. So then another part of it, just to be sure of the operation of it, was you'd raise the cage up and you'd roll it out there into the launch tube and drop it down, and then raise it back up, and then pull it back in. Well, it went through all that okay. I wasn't at the cage at the time. I was working the diving board. The cage operator guy, he got into the work cage and he started going out there, and he got the pins in, and he come back up and instead of taking the bolts out of the RV, and you'd have a way to extend the legs out so you were closer to the missile. He got out about maybe two feet, and all of a sudden the one yolk slipped out of the thing there. It wasn't pinned in all the way. So that thing bent, and the guy was hanging there. So we had to sit there and throw him a rope, and then he had to tie the rope off to the work cage so in case it fell, it wouldn't fall all the way to the bottom. We finally got him back in and then that was it. That was an accident. The only, I think, damage there was the guy's underwear.

And somebody else, like I mentioned to you about whenever you dropped any kind of handling equipment through those doors on the truck . . . picture number five. Any time you had a pendant topside and you had a pendant for downstairs for the team chief to use . . . this was another accident that happened. This was more serious than the one I was talking about. You're supposed to run that equipment through the door, and once it clears the door you turn over control to the downstairs team. Well, somebody didn't. Sometimes people would take the cheap shortcut, just doing the topside. You've got to have good communications and say, okay, everything is out. Then they would pull it up. Well, apparently somebody didn't do that. Part of the thing is, you don't ever take all those bolts out of those sections until you have something connected to it. I guess they had it connected to it, and they didn't make sure that all the screws were out of the missile, the third stage there. They just pulled it and they just ripped the whole thing off. You could see where it just . . . I mean, the thing had to strain to come off. So we had to go out there, and so they had to pull the whole missile on that one. Then they asked me how did this happen, and I told them, "Well, this is how it happened." I said, "They didn't pull all the screws out, and topside was probably doing it."

HOSKING: Would you end up just being like a reprimand, court martial? Or could you potentially lose your job, basically, for that?

ROWEN: I'm not sure whatever happened. I'm sure probably an Article 13, I'm sure. And you probably would have your security clearance pulled, and you wouldn't be

dispatching anymore. Because that's gross negligence right there. You're dealing with something that once lit it does not go out until it burns itself out. But I don't know whatever happened to them. I can't recall that.

HOSKING: It happened out of your earshot, then.

ROWEN: Oh yeah. Because it was . . . what the heck was it? I remember hearing about another incident, but I don't remember . . . hopefully, I'll remember it.

HOSKING: Okay. Back on Ellsworth, we wonder how much . . . did you ever get into the warhead assembly building? Did you do much in that realm, or was it something where you just picked up the components and took off with them?

ROWEN: That's a nice segue to another part that I was going to bring up to you also. There were times where we'd have to go out on what was called a bomb swap. The team chief was always part of that. It was the team chief and the guy from the topside. They would have to go up to what we called the weapon storage area. That's also where they kept all the nukes, naturally. They would go up there and they would pick up the nuke from that spot, and you'd have the security detail right there on the spot. I think I was up there maybe one time for a dispatch. When I was on my OJT training, we went up there for a familiarization, but we never did see any of them broke down or anything else like that, disassembled was what I meant. They just, there's a missile over there, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. There were no civilians up there. It was just all military.

But you talk about the safety also. We never connected anything out there unless you did an electrical check first. Now, whenever you needed to do an RV swap, they would take the van out there . . . well, the team would be split in half. The team chief and one topside guy would go with the van, and they would have a whole security arrangement with that, a whole big security detail, more than just two cops. Then the other part of the team would go out to the site, and they would have to work extra hard because we'd be the ones that would have to go out there and get everything ready for the job.

The guys would come out there with a truck. They would back the truck over, and before they did anything else, they would have to jump out and then go inside the trailer. And it's usually with the commander from the security team. They would have to do what was called an RV continuity and RV circuit test. It was basically a little simple check, like a little hand twist type dealy. They'd have to go in there and connect this up to the bomb and make sure that all the circuits weren't damaged from the ride out there and make sure nothing goes on.

Well, they had a problem. I think I was on leave or something like that at the time, but it happened one time when I was out there to the team that I worked

with. They went out there and they did that check, and it failed. So the first thing you go . . . in the TO it tells you that you recheck all your connections. So they rechecked all the connections, they tested it. It still failed. So there was some concern about the bomb being bad, being live. They sent out another one of those testers, by chopper, with some guys from . . . they also sent out some guys from . . . they got some guys from the weapons storage area who worked on the RV, so they sent out another one of those testers. They checked it again to verify it. The whole routine again. They connected it all, did the test. It failed. Rechecked the connections, did all the troubleshooting they were supposed to, all under the control of . . . well, direct contact with Job Control and everybody else. It still failed.

Then they dispatched a team from the base weapons storage area, and they came out there and they tore that whole RV apart and took the bomb off of it and brought the bomb back. And the bomb itself, those things aren't that big. (laughs) I mean, they're really not. The whole big green shield was just . . . it's not that big. The bomb itself is not that big. They say like maybe three feet, four feet tall. It's all black. So it's not really big. That was probably the most exciting thing, I think, that ever happened out there.

HOSKING: There's one thing we kind of wonder about. Everyone's got family members, everyone has friends, and we always wonder how did you deal with telling them about your day's work, or whatever, if you were ever asked. We know you deal with a lot of sensitive stuff. Was it just like, yeah, we went out today and changed out a reentry vehicle, and that was it? You didn't go into much?

ROWEN: Yeah, that was basically it. The whole thing itself was a critical field. It was classified top secret crypto. Cryptographic, that's all the security clearance. But as far as any . . . the only top secret information we ever really had, and not everybody on the team did, was usually the team chief and the assistant team chief had the code pages, top secret code pages. That's to allow you access to the site itself. Other than that, there really wasn't no classified information out there for us. I mean, there was nothing classified about it. What do you do? Well, a lot of times our team chief would call into the base, to Job Control. He would probably say, "I'm the number one spot. What's going out there?" "Well, you've got a can change." "Okay." Or, "You're doing a bomb swap," or whatever. It was no big deal. As far as keeping it hush-hush, in that respect, no, it was no big deal.

HOSKING: Do you have anything else you can think of about the duties you worked on that I might not have asked about, that you might not have told me yet?

ROWEN: There was an incident . . . unfortunately, I fell asleep on this one. The one time I went with a bomb swap with the team chief . . . normally, when you did these jobs, like a can change, CAT-1 change or a CAT-1 job, category 1 can change, everybody had to be armed with at least a .38 caliber pistol. But when you did

the bomb swaps, the team chief and the topside guy who went with the team chief in the RV GNC van, they were required to pick up M16s. Also, you'd have to pick up a couple of duffel bags from VCB that had your flak vest, mask, helmet, and some other security equipment like that. But when you did those bomb swaps, they didn't want you to leave before sunrise, and you'd have to make sure that the convoy commander was there and ready. You usually had about maybe forty or fifty security police. These guys were armed with the M60s, that's a 7.76 machinegun, and some of them had the M203s, just like the .30 millimeter grenade launchers underneath the M16s. After awhile, they had those Peacemakers, those armored cars, and I think those guys were armed with . . . the turret had M60s. I don't know if they had the .50 caliber or not.

Sometimes we had to wait for a federal marshal. You were sitting just inside the main gate waiting for everything to get ready. Then they said, okay, go ahead. Once you started rolling in that convoy with the bomb, you did not stop. We were authorized to use deadly force, and they probably wouldn't have hesitated to. They ended up talking about it . . . I'd fallen asleep. But there was always a federal marshal in a Jeep Wagoneer who was in the head of this thing with the lights and the siren going, or whatever. People that didn't pull over, he would literally run them off the road. He would take his truck and put them up against the side of that vehicle and he would move them off the road. And he did it that one time. He literally pushed somebody off the road with his truck. Like, you have to move. Just like in the emergency vehicles, you have to move.

I remember hearing on the radio . . . he said, "Hey, hey, hey. Did you hear this?" I go, "No." He goes, "You missed it." And then you heard the convoy commander talking, "Hey, Marshal, you okay?" He goes, "Yeah. The guy didn't want to get off the road, so I had to show him the way to do things." (laughs)

Sometimes some of the other jobs we had to do . . . we talked about the environmental and about the heating and the cooling of it. It seems like every other year they'd have what's called a code change. They would go out there and they would change the code. That was usually like a three-day dispatch. You'd have to pack up and be prepared for three days out in the field. I mean, you had no choice. You are RONing it all, period.

Basically, what our job was, we would go out there to the site, with all the equipment to open up the site, to get everything ready to open up the site. We didn't open . . . well, I think we did open up the site. Combat Targeting would go out there and they would get the combination for the security, for the B-plug, and then they would go ahead and open up the site, and we would help them. These guys were doing like seven or eight sites a day. Big teamwork involved here. You'd have several teams out there doing this.

We would go out there, and we'd open up the site for Combat Targeting. We would let them on site. Then they would go downstairs and we would lower the equipment for them and help them out with their code change. Then they would come back out, and we would pull all their equipment back up, and they would be on their way to the next site, and we'd close this one up. They'd have another team at the next site that they were scheduled to go to already with the site open. And that's all we would do. Then we would leapfrog all day from site to site to site. That was a code change.

Another thing we had to do sometimes was called flood control. That was in the springtime after the heavy snows and stuff like that. We'd have to go out there and look at these sites and make sure that there were channels dug out, or trenches dug out for the snow. Sometimes we'd even have to shovel out the snow to make sure that everything would drain away from the site so it wouldn't get inside the site.

There were times, just like a real gravy job. They had these heaters that . . . the fuel that they used was gasoline. They were called H-1 heaters. Really big heaters. Some of them were powered by a gas motor and some of them were electrical, but this thing was . . . it would really kick out the heat, man. I mean, it would crank out some heat. And we had to go up there. This was called a gravy job. Watch it heat up, whee-hah! Bring the Frisbees! (laughs) Bring the Frisbees, bring the books, we got an easy job today.

We'd have to go up there and open up the site and run these tubes down into the launch tube and heat up the launch tube, because if it got down to like fifty, sixty degrees, they didn't like that. They wanted to make sure that a temperature change didn't happen too many times with the missiles because . . . well, it wasn't good for the stages. Sometimes the chemicals or stuff like that would leach out of them, which is what happened to me one time. When I was the cage man, I opened up one of the access covers . . . I don't know, it was the second stage or whatever like that. I was putting in an igniter switch or something like that. But, anyway, it was between the stages. I think it was on the top of the third stage I was putting in the third stage igniter, because I could see like this brown tar or something. It was like a perma-gasket, like a gasket tack. It had drained out of one of the nozzles on the second stage, and it was drained out onto the top of the third stage. I picked it up and touched it and it was tacky.

Of course, whenever you see something like that you're supposed to tell the team chief, so I told him and he said, "Okay. Stop what you're doing." He called the Job Control and told them about it, and they says, "Cease what you're doing." They talked and they talked and they talked, and he said, "Do you feel comfortable doing it?" I said, "Yeah, go ahead." I mean, it's not in the way, I don't have to worry about it. We basically didn't . . . we didn't do the job. We basically just . . . if I remember correct, I think we went ahead and did

the can change, but the missile was scheduled for a rotation out. Then they find out later on that this stuff was like pure nitroglycerin or some jazz that had leached out. I said, "Oh, great!" Here I am tamping on this stuff. I think that was probably the hairiest thing that I had to deal with.

Another time, there was an inspection team and they had to be in the launch tube for corrosion prevention or something like that. But every once in a while, them tubes, when the doors open up, they're great hiding places for mice and snakes. One time a couple of rattlesnakes had fallen down inside the tube all the way down to the bottom, so they had to call in a herpetologist from the base to come in there, and they had to drop the guy down there to go down with this guy to catch these snakes. Some girl on the team, she had the rattles from a couple of rattlesnakes. We'd always find mice doing a kamikaze running off into the launch tube all the way down to the bottom. We'd grab these snakes, and we had pet snakes. The bull snakes, we had them as pets. We'd open the door and you'd see these nests from the snakes and the mice and whatnot and say, "Hey, we got a pet." We always had pet bull snakes, and we never had to worry about buying the food for them because you'd just capture a mouse. You'd roll the door open and there's a mouse nest. Okay, here.

Let's see. What else? A couple of times there was something really neat. We were out there in the prairie. To me it seemed like it was the embodiment of the wild west, of the plains, the cowboys and the cattle, the whole nine yards. One time, I think we were on 212 or maybe it was like 34 or 38, something like that, but it was out there in the middle of nowhere. We come over the top of a hill, and we had to slow down to like twenty mile an hour because for about two miles we were stuck right in the middle of a herd of cattle. The rancher was moving them from one field to another. I'm telling you, we had to go really, really slow. Maybe twenty miles an hour might have been kind of high. We had to do that one time. I can remember that happening.

Then you always had to worry about the sheep. I guess sheep are pretty skittish. I guess somebody was kind of anxious about them being in the road, so he honked the horn and they panicked and they died of a heart attack. So I guess they had to pay for that. That guy didn't dispatch anymore after that.

Then there were incidences with the turkeys. You'd get down on some of the bottoms . . . that's where I first learned that a turkey can fly really good. I guess somebody had hit a turkey one time. A couple of times this had happened. A turkey had jumped up and it went through the window of a truck. Another time, they were using . . . well, we had these side mirrors on these trucks that we were using for MET vans. They're pretty heavy-duty steel, but to hit a turkey with that mirror, it just bent the daylights out of that mirror. They had to replace the whole thing.

And seeing prairie chickens and antelope and mule deer, white tail deer, and eagles, a lot of eagles. We saw a lot of bald eagles, a lot of golden eagles, and a lot of baby balds. I can remember times out there behind one of the sites, a whole big giant field of sunflowers. They were all in bloom, too. It was really pretty cool.

Actually, it was pretty interesting. I'm kind of glad I did that. It was the best time of my life. I really enjoyed what I did out there. Where else can you be, nineteen years old . . . I mean, you're not even old enough to legally drink alcohol, liquor, but yet you're carrying firearms and in charge of direct contact with nuclear bombs. I mean, where else can you have that?

HOSKING: Well, I guess kind of thinking about it, I'm not sure if you really thought of it much at the time, but how real did you think something like an attack by the Soviet Union was?

ROWEN: I didn't worry about it because Mr. McNamara was mutual assured destruction. We knew that what we had was good, and we weren't worried about it. There was concerns about it, but you just didn't think about it. If you dwelt on it too much, you wouldn't be able to function. You just knew that, well, if it happened it happened. No sense worrying about it because I can't control it.

HOSKING: Well, I guess the last question I have for you is about the arms reduction, just your feelings about the arms reduction. Too soon? Not soon enough? That type of thing.

ROWEN: I thought about this once. Minuteman II was old and it was pretty much obsolete, so it was destined to be retired, which is a good thing. Last year when I was out there, I went down to see my brother in Colorado, so I drove by F.E. Warren. I stopped off at a tourist center out there, a welcome center from the state. I seen something there where they had deactivated the MX, the Peacemaker Missile. I was thinking, why did they do that? Why? I don't think we need to have a thousand missiles ready to launch at a moment's notice, because that's a serious case of overkill. But I don't think we should have deactivated our most accurate missile up there. I would like to see us keep maybe a hundred of those Peacemakers, the MXs. Hey, a hundred and fifty missiles would be more than enough to wreak havoc with any country, or the whole world for that matter. I don't think we ought to disarm totally. No, not at all. I think China is our big threat now. And the Soviets . . . we'll never be buddy-buddies with them. Plus, we have to watch out for the little countries like North Korea and Iran.

I think there's still a need for the nuclear deterrent, to be honest with you. I still think we need that. We need more than just . . . the whole triad system, I think we need all of that, the sea, the aircraft, and the ICBM. I don't think we ought

to disarm totally, no. Actually, I'd like to see us . . . we have the capability of a neutron bomb. I think we ought to advance to that, too.

HOSKING: More bang for your buck?

ROWEN: Yeah. I mean, the technology is there. The demon is already open. The genie is out of the bottle. People have it. Why shouldn't we have it? It's like . . . oh, say like self-protection, you know?

HOSKING: Yeah, I know that you're talking about.

ROWEN: I don't trust the Chinese. The Chinese are going to defeat us . . . well, *could* defeat us the way Russia never did. The Chinese could bury us economically easily. And I don't think they're our friends. I don't care what president is in the office. I don't care who it is. The Chinese are not our friends, and they never will be our friends. They're a socialist government, and that's the bottom line.

I hope we don't ever get to the point of disarming the ICBM fleet, period. I'm glad that none of them has ever had to have been used. That's really great. Thank God. Because that would be pretty much the end of the world.

HOSKING: Well, from what we keep getting told, they're doing their job right now. Like you said, as a deterrent, not as an offensive weapon.

ROWEN: I could bargain by that line. I agree with that statement a hundred percent.

HOSKING: I've had arguments with it. It's one of those things that everyone has their own interpretation of it.

ROWEN: That's why I say we need to hold triad, the aircraft based nukes and the submarine nukes. See, the main thing about the missiles is, once they leave the silo or the tube, there's pretty much nothing you can do about it. You can't recall them. Whereas, with the bombers . . . I mean, it would be difficult for the bombers to get in nowadays. Well, except for maybe the B2s and the stealth fighters would be able to get in there. But the best thing about the aircraft is you can always recall them. You have a little bit more leeway before you have to call them back. The missiles, like I say, once the missiles are gone, they're gone. I mean, you can just forget about it. You cannot recall them.

I have a comment about the Iraq war if you want to hear that. (laughs)

HOSKING: Well, we can conclude the interview and we can chat about that if you'd like.

ROWEN: Okay.

HOSKING: I really do appreciate your time and effort with our program here, talking about the Minuteman project and the part and kind of your part in that. Like I said, I really thank you for the time you spent with us and the desire to do this.

ROWEN: My pleasure. I mean, it's a part of history, and I'm not doing it for recognition. It's just something . . . I just think it's great that I could be able to contribute something to it.

Break in interview to wrap up and during this break Mr. Rowen began telling the following story.

ROWEN: Like those convoys, we always drove to . . . well, they always made sure that they didn't drive through towns. They never went through Sturgis. They tried to make sure that they skipped any railroad crossings. They didn't want to go over railroad crossings with that thing, either. I think sometimes they had a helicopter, but most of the time I really can't recall a helicopter being a part of the convoy. They did have it on occasion. For a long time there, there wasn't no helicopter, but then I think after a while they went along with their helicopter. It was kind of like a wasted effort because the only thing they had there at Ellsworth was those unarmed Hueys.

Here's a story about our helicopters and how serious they took the site security. I made the comment to you earlier about sometimes if you had a problem with a piece of equipment and they airlifted it out there, they choppered it. If it was really a high priority and they wanted that thing back up on alert as soon as possible, like I said, they'd send it by chopper. So there are helipads marked out on those missile sites. However, you have to have authorization, they have to know who you are, they have to have authorization to land on them sites. They don't want you coming in there and doing buzzes on the site. They don't like that. People tend to get nervous, especially when they had the launch closure open.

Because that happened to us one time. I took a break. I had to go to the bathroom or something like that. We had a situation going on, so I had a couple minutes to kill. I pulled the work cage around and I jumped out of it. I came up topside and went up to go to the bathroom and have a cigarette. The next thing I know there's a helicopter buzzing around acting like he was going to land. I asked the security alert team, the tech team there, the guards, I said, "Hey, what's going on here? Who called the chopper?" They guys says, "I don't know. Did you guys call the chopper?" They said, "No." I said, "Well, you better call this thing in." So he calls up to the LCF and asked the FSC about it, and they go, "No, there's no chopper supposed to land." Then the guy told the security guard on the site, the LCF, that this guy's going to land. And the guy says, "Do not let him take off. Do whatever you have to, but do not let him take off. If that thing hits the ground, have him sit there and shut it down." By this time, I reached out there and I grabbed my firearm, because I didn't carry it

with me all the time. I mean, it was in the way. I didn't like the idea of having a firearm inside the launch tube anyway in case it fell out of my holster or whatever. So I had it on.

This captain that was piloting this chopper, he brings it in there and he sets it down on the ground. The guards automatically jump out of the truck, they slam the clips into the M16s, you see them pull back the charging handles on these things, and they flip the clips off, the safeties off, and they're standing there in a defensive posture pointing right at this chopper. I'm running towards this guy with my hand on my pistol, and his eyes, I swear to God, looked like saucers. He starts to rev the thing up, and I shake my head and do the cut motion across the throat, like shut it down. I came up there to him and I said, "You've got to shut this thing down." And he goes, "Well, I can't shut it down. If I shut it down, they gotta bring a cart out here from the base to start it up again." I says, "Okay, fine. Leave it at idle. *Do not* take off. Do you understand me? *Do not* take off." I said, "We don't know who the hell you are. You don't even have permission to be doing this, buddy. We don't know who the hell you are. Do not take off." And I just walked away from him.

So I got down the tail number on his chopper. One of the guards stood up there at a stance, and we started hearing the buzz from the radio, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, and you could see this guy, the pilot, was talking on the radio, too. Then the flight security guy, I was talking to him. I think he handled me his radio so I could . . . he says, "Okay, you gotta go up there and get this guy's ID and bring it back. He should be this guy." I said, "Okay." So I went out there and I said, "I need your ID, Sir." So he gave me his ID, and I went back. They said, "Okay, this guy checks out," blah, blah, blah. "Let him go." So . . . yeah. (laughs) They gave him back his ID, and he powered the thing back up and then voom. He headed right to the base. His time out there was done. I guess he was taking some lieutenant around practicing touch-and-goes on the sites. I said, "You ain't supposed to be doing this. Who the hell are you? We don't even know who the hell you are."

I think they read him the riot act. I think he probably got an Article 15 or a letter of rep out of that one. I think he got really, really, seriously hammered on that one, because the door was open, the whole nine yards. They didn't like that.

[end]

Appendix



Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4



Photo 5



Photo 6



Photo 7